



Wigs

Sarah Eyre

Supporting material

- 'Uncanny Femininity: An Interview with Sarah Eyre', *Beyond Photography*.
- 'Sarah Eyre: Work in Progress', *Sara Jaspan*.
- 'An Exhibition of Wigs: by Sarah Eyre', *HocTok*
- 'Sarah Eyre - Cut/Copy/Paste', *WIA*.



UNCANNY FEMININITY

AN INTERVIEW WITH SARAH EYRE

*True love never dies and we, at Beyond Photography, can't help but remain to be obsessed with the beautiful art form that is Collage. A month has passed since **'An Ode to Collage'**, a week dedicated to some of the best artists collage has to offer. Well, Collage is back again with the incredible work by the amazing Sarah Eyre, collage artist and wig enthusiast from Manchester, United Kingdom. Her work explores narratives surrounding the body, gender and identity. We sat down with her and discussed Art Creation in the 21st century.*



"Your work is truly fascinating. What themes does your work touch upon?"

I use photography and collage techniques to introduce subtle interventions my own photographic work and on found images in order to subvert conventional object/body relationships. I have an abiding fascination for the uncanny and the surreal in everyday objects and this informs my collages. My work explores the relationship between hair and wigs and their relationship to gender, identity and the female body in a playful way.

I am currently concerned with an exploration of the connections between hair and wigs and their relationship to the body. I think they are particularly unique and fascinating objects because they don't quite fit in to usual object categories. They play a very particular social and performative function, which is to affirm, exaggerate or disguise some aspect of the wearer's identity, or project a new one. They are part object, part body, and can reveal anxieties around the boundaries between the self and the outside world. Also, the knowledge that they are often made from real human hair raises anxieties around

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"I would love to hear about your process."

I manipulate and photograph women's wigs in order to draw attention to their strangeness. I mostly take my own 'still life' images and then make collages from laser prints of my work. I like the cheap, punky aesthetic of laser prints. I cut into the photographs and these cuts are often based on the shape of the human form - sometimes faces, sometimes bodies. I layer the images leaving holes and gaps. Holes connect inside and outside, and can suggest a sense of incompleteness, and this links back to my interest in wigs, and their transformative power to slightly 'undo' the seamlessness of the body. I photograph the collages to flatten them back down (they only exist as collages temporarily).

I have another ongoing body of work (as yet untitled) which is more traditionally collage-based (in the sense that I cut out and glue bits of paper), I use found images, mostly taken from fashion magazines. Instead of cutting out subjects in each picture, I've been more interested in using the negative space in between the models' bodies - cutting around and utilising the 'empty' bit of the picture. These spaces a part body and part hole, and for me they represent a sense of movement (as much as a collage can represent movement). They are quite similar and when they are all laid out they look a bit like animation cells or frames. In fact I have made animated collages and turned them into GIFs, this is something I'd like to do more of.

object, part body, and can reveal anxieties around the boundaries between the self and the outside world. Also, the knowledge that they are often made from real human hair raises anxieties around 'contamination', that threaten the otherwise clearly defined social and physical boundaries we create around our bodies.

My themes are quite theoretical however, I do approach my work with a playful and experimental attitude.



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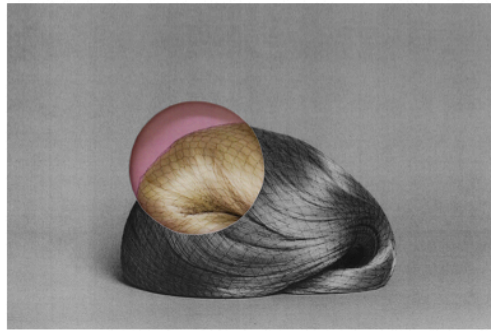
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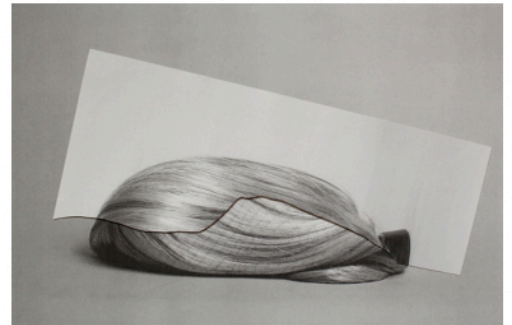


"What do you want your audience to think about when they see your photographs of wigs?"

I'm layering suggestions of the body within the head collages. I guess I do this because I want people to think about what a wig is, the way that wearing one transforms the body a little bit, and also maybe a way of summoning up the kinds of women that the wigs / heads connote. My images all have female names, these are the names given to the wigs by the manufacturers - another way of connoting a particular type or stereotype of women. A bit like the fashion images I use too - all these different representations of women - through wigs, names and glossy magazine images are a bit half formed - they are just facades and surfaces.

"All the themes you touch upon are only enhanced through your collaging and layering of images on top of each other. Do you consider yourself to be a photographer?"

Yes I guess I do consider myself to be a photographer. I take most of the images I use for my collages although I have made more traditional collages from found materials, and I sometimes combine both. If I define myself as a photographer then I feel as if the work I'm making pushes a little at photographic conventions (I did a photography degree and I teach photography so I do feel steeped in photographic tradition). If I didn't have that photographic framework then I would have nothing to push against.



"Pushing against photography as a medium is a great way to challenge art creation. Who/what inspires you?"

I'm inspired by loads of things - I'm a huge consumer of imagery through magazines, films, books, exhibitions! I've already mentioned surrealism - I'm particularly inspired by female surrealists like Claude Cahun, Aileen Agar, Hannah Hoch (not really a surrealist I know), and Meret Oppenheim - mostly for their ability to make the everyday strange and radical. I'm very inspired by sculpture particularly Louise Bourgeois and Sarah Lucas. Artists who use collage and photography in interesting and boundary pushing ways that inspire me include Linder Sterling, Ellen



ways that inspire me include Linder Sterling, Ellen Gallagher, Lorna Simpson, Wangechi Mutu, and not forgetting John Stezaker! Some of my work critiques fashion photography - however, I am actually quite inspired by a lot of it - there are loads of young photographers changing the way the fashion body is represented - photographers like Viviane Sassen, Jamie Hawksworth, Maise Cousins, Prue Stent - there are tons.

"Thank you."

Sarah Eyre: Work in Progress

by Sara Jaspan



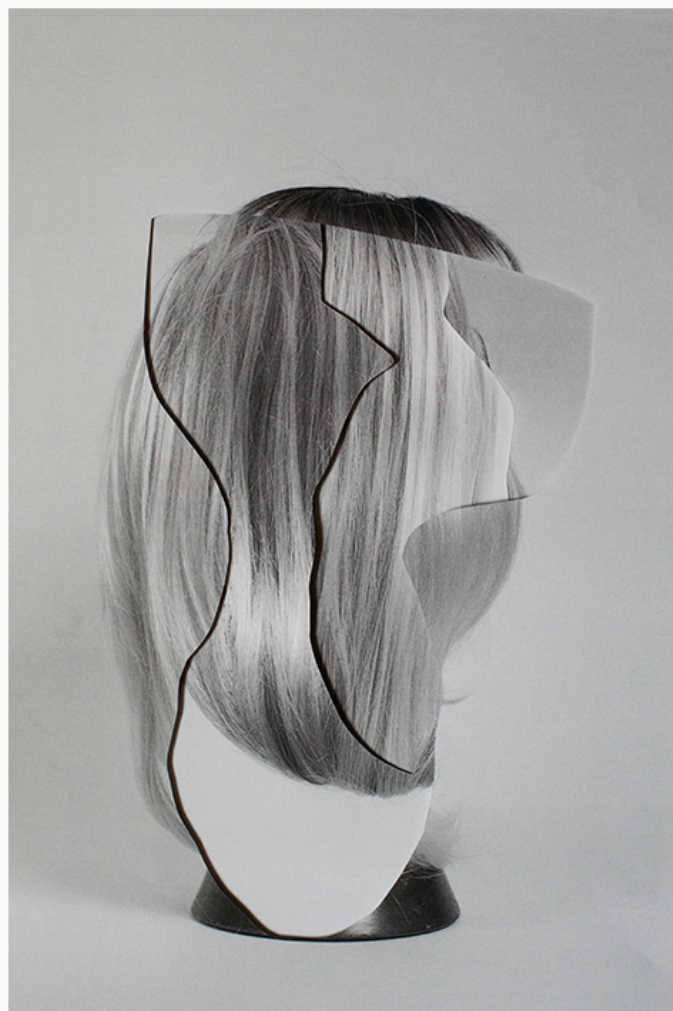
Sarah Eyre is a lens-based artist whose practice centres around the rather hairy subject of wigs – specifically women's wigs, and their relationship to gender, identity and the female body. She's currently very busy developing two new series of work which will appear in her upcoming solo exhibition at PAPER in October. Here she explains where she's up to in the process, giving a fairly unique insight into the creative journey behind what we will later see on the gallery walls.

Sara Jaspán: Can you tell us a bit about the two projects you're currently working on? How do they build upon your previous work?

Sarah Eyre: For the last five years, I have mostly focused on exploring the body's relationship with objects, specifically wigs. Why wigs? Well, in my opinion, there's no other object quite like them. They play a very particular social, performative function, which is to affirm, exaggerate or disguise some aspect of the wearer's identity, or project a new one. Part object, part body; wigs can reveal anxieties around the boundaries between the self and the outside world. While the knowledge that they are often made from real human hair taps into deep, inbuilt fears around 'contamination', that threaten the otherwise clearly defined social boundaries we create around class and gender.

The two new series that I'm working on for PAPER are quite different from each other, though both are fundamentally about exploring the body as something fluid and porous. The first, I currently refer to as *Untitled Wig Cuts* (though this title may change), and connects to *Penetralia* – a series I developed back in 2015 during the Tracing PAPER artist mentorship scheme. *Penetralia* (an architectural term for the innermost parts of a building; a secret or hidden place) examines the more fundamental properties of a wig; probing its interior spaces – or 'dark underbelly' you might say – treating it in quite an abstract way. I've kept this element in *Untitled Wig Cuts*, using my own pictures of wigs to create photo-montages, then cutting into the surface of each to suggest a sense of layering. This also taps into my interest in the boundaries of photography itself – a medium that deals entirely with surfaces.

The second series, which I'm currently calling *Fluorescent*, is more collage-based; incorporating found images, mostly taken from fashion magazines. Instead of concentrating on the subjects in each picture, I've been more interested in the negative space in between the models' bodies – cutting around and utilising the 'empty' bit of the picture. I'm not quite sure what exactly draws me to this yet, and will probably only understand properly once the work is 'finished'. But it probably relates to my fascination with incompleteness and the interior space of the wig. As well as fashion magazines, I've also been drawing a lot upon sculpture books, and the very idealised depiction of gender and the human body that they present. Which, in turn, connects back to my interest in fashion photography.



SJ: What thoughts or ideas remain still unresolved?

SE: Neither series is quite 'finished' yet and are very much works in progress. But one of the big questions I'm still unsure of is how I will present the work. I feel a third element might be needed to draw the two series together within the context of a single exhibition. This could mean creating a third piece that does this; or introducing an earlier work. For example, the individual parts of *Fluorescent* look a bit like animated cells when all laid out together, as if illustrating movement; so they might work well alongside one of my GIFs. Alternatively, it might just be a question of playing with different hanging methods. I could experiment with layering, framing or different grouping patterns, or installing the two series in different spaces. We'll see.

The title of each series is the other element that remains unresolved. I often struggle here. I'm quite interested in the names given to different styles of wigs by their manufacturers, such as 'Ruby' and 'Anastasia', which are loaded with certain social and cultural baggage. So maybe this will lead to something.

SJ: What is your working process like? How do you approach making new bodies of work?

SE: I take a very intuitive, experimental approach to begin with – which often results in a lot of unfinished work! When something feels unresolved, I like to just throw something new at it and take things in a whole other direction. When I'm in the studio, I also try to keep as much work out and within eyesight as possible, so ideas can feed into each other and be quietly developing in the background. Once a piece is properly underway, however, I then enter a period of research and reflection, drawing out different connections and considering the direction I want things to evolve in. Though I don't tend to think of a work as ever completely 'finished', it's only after you've moved on that you really start to understand what it's about.



SJ: Where did your interest in wigs first begin? What led you to begin using them in your work?

SE: I've always been fascinated by their power of transformation, and liked to play with them when I was younger as a way of altering my identity. I began using them in my work when I realised how interesting they are to see photographed – it really draws out their uncanny, macabre side. You can also mould them, shape them, turn them inside out; exploring their many literal and suggestive layers. My first body of work using wigs featured shop bought, off-the-peg ones, photographed from behind, with just enough 'pose' to suggest a wearer. I was making reference to the way that surface attributes are the site where identities – especially female identities – tend to be interpreted and classified.

By the time I started making *Penetralia*, I had become more interested in the wig's formal properties. We don't often see wigs without the structure of a head or stand. Once these are taken away, their inside and outside begin to collapse in on each other, confusing the boundaries between interior and exterior. Similarly, folding a wig could be seen as a 'folding' its purpose: externalising the inner aspect of the wearer's identity. A wig's interior is actually a space that doesn't really exist in a physical sense, as it is designed as a surface that moulds to the wearer's head.

SJ: Could you tell us a bit about the role of gaps, holes and negative spaces in your work?

SE: I'm interested in opening out the idea of body and gender: undoing the binary perspective through which we tend to see masculine and feminine identity, and opening channels of passage between the two. I've also become increasingly fascinated by the difference between a gap and a hole. Is there one? Holes connect inside and outside, and can suggest a sense of incompleteness. While gaps seem to suggest movement, flux, change or transition. As the work develops, I may begin accentuating the gaps more to develop this idea of change or transformation further, connecting to the idea of gender as something equally fluid.



SJ: Where does your interest in gender and the body come from?

SE: I guess I became particularly focused on these subjects whilst studying for my undergraduate degree in Photography at Nottingham Trent University. I did my training in the 1990s, and was very influenced by the many feminist artists making work at the time, such as Cindy Sherman and Barbara Kruger. Alongside my art practice, I also teach Fashion Photography – a form that I have a rather difficult relationship with. It presents the body in such an exciting, seductive, yet deceptive way. I aim to offer a playful yet critical position on this through my own artwork.

SJ: What connection do you see between photography and your subject matter?

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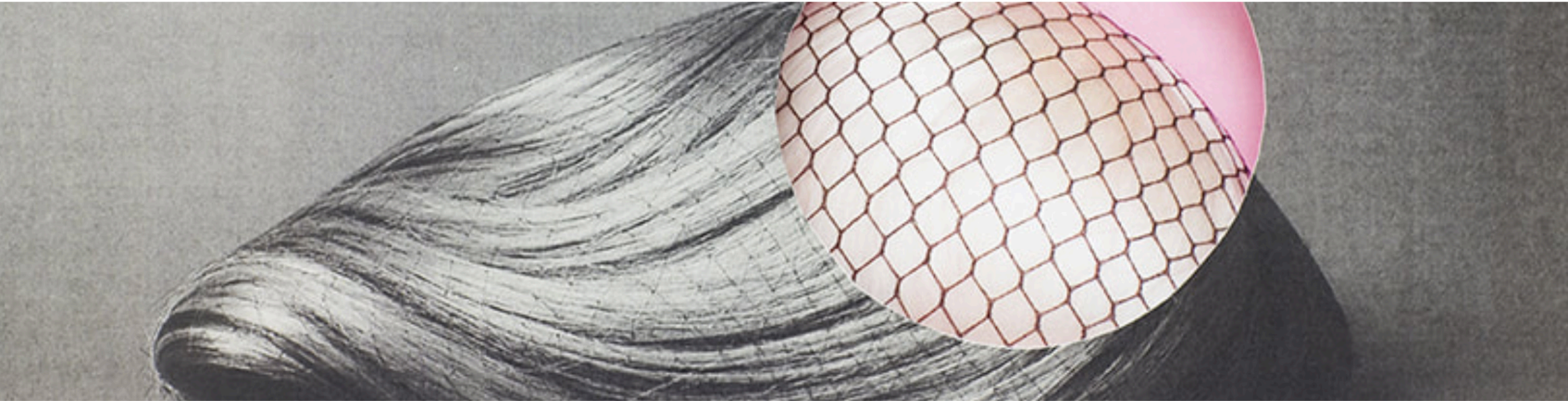
SE: As a society, we consume a lot of our ideas around gender and identity through the images we are presented with, so there's a very direct relationship there. However, as someone who has worked with photography for a long time, I'm also very interested in using these subjects as a means of exploring the medium of photography itself – destabilising our understanding of the photograph (which we tend to think of as a very stable thing), as well as gender and identity. It's all about questioning what we see, and how the photograph presents the world back to us.

Sarah Eyre's solo exhibition opens at PAPER on 7 October and runs until 12 November 2017.



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An Exhibition of Wigs

by Sarah Eyre

Dear Sarah,

Thank you for your interview.

How do you identify yourself and your work?

I guess I would define myself as some kind of lens-based artist, or multimedia artist as I use a range of different methods to make my work - most recently traditional collage techniques (by that I mean literally cutting paper based materials), and stop frame animation techniques where I've turned still images and collages in to animated gifs - so I guess I'm working with digital materials too.

However, my practice is very rooted in photography - and although my work doesn't always look like photography in a traditional sense, it's informed by photographic theories, and it's many of these theories that provide a framework for me to push against.

So maybe I'm actually a photographer with an identity crisis.

How do you choose your themes for each project?



Photo: courtesy of the artist

I'm doing a practice-based PhD, which means my themes have been pretty focused around the relationship between things that we wear, and the human body. I'll probably continue this for a long time as it's such a fascinating subject.

I tend to be drawn to themes that are to do with how we interact with the wider world – especially the non-human parts of the world – for example, things... Objects and things – how we invest them with meaning, how we interact with them. I'm particularly interested in how we interact with broken things.

Do you pay more attention to technical details or the overall effect of a series?

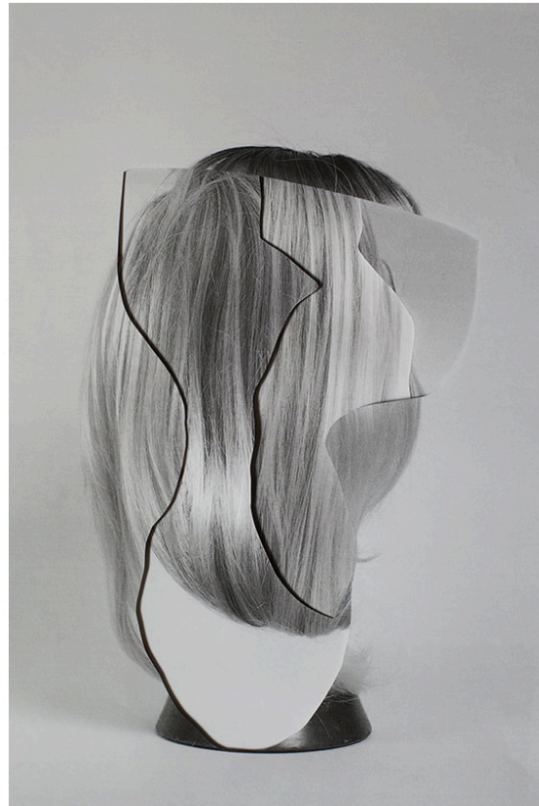
Both really. They inform each other. It's an ongoing process.

Who are some of the artists who have influenced you?

Louise Bourgeois, Linder Sterling, Ellen Gallagher, Sarah Lucas, Mona Hatoum, John Stezaker, Emma Hart, Francis Bacon, Lorna Simpson. There are many more – but these are the ones that I currently keep coming back to.

Is it easier or more difficult to be a visual artist/photographer in today's world? Why?

I really don't know. To make a living from art has always been difficult. Because of the internet we are so aware of the amount of work out there / artists out there so it can feel overwhelming. However, there are lots of advantages to being an artist now - the ease of research, the ease of networking, the amount of places to get your work seen, the breaking up of the established art hierarchies in terms of gallery representation, and of course the access to technology is much easier now.



As an art consumer, what types of experiences do you seek from art of different genres?

As an art consumer, what types of experiences do you seek from art of different genres?

Well, I like to be challenged, excited and inspired by all genres. I'm not that bothered by the distinction between genres. In fact, I probably prefer art that escapes traditional genres. However, different kinds of work affect me in different ways. I like to be moved and informed by art, too.

Often, but not exclusively, photography can tell stories about people and their circumstances in a way that's very visceral. I felt that recently when looking at Dana Lixenberg's photographs. I also love fashion photography. I find some of the most experimental and visually interesting work in the pages of style magazines. In fact, I think many so-called fashion photographers, especially some of the younger female ones like: Viviane Sassen, Coco Capitan and Harley Weir communicate far more about gender politics than much fine art / documentary work I see.

When was the last time you felt frustrated for not achieving what you had set out to do for whatever reason and how did you get over it?

I feel frustrated and under-achieving every day. Like most artists, I'm juggling lots of other things and trying to make time to make work. So sometimes I get overwhelmed by all the different things I should be doing, then I end up procrastinating...familiar story I guess.

What do I do to get over it? I don't really, I just keep chipping away at it... I don't think there's an answer Deadlines focus the mind. I do try and make sure I line up plenty of those. Switching projects also gets me out of a rut. That's why I like to have a few different things on the go, too. Sometimes flipping an idea on its head, trying it out using a different material, or medium works.

Where do you take refuge from the modern madness and recharge your batteries for more work ahead?

I'm not sure I do take refuge, I like the modern madness... But when I need a break I do the things most people do - go for a walk, go for drinks or watch bad TV. Regular trips to the seaside would be the dream refuge.

What is the most hopeful story you have heard lately that has inspired you tremendously?

In art terms the artist Phyllida Barlow is inspiring. She has been making work for years, whilst teaching and bringing up her kids. Her work didn't really take off in a big way until she was in her middle age. She's now in her 70s and still producing ambitious work. In fact she's exhibiting at the British Pavilion at the Venice Biennale. I think that goes to show that you just need to keep doing it, keep working.

What are you currently working on?

I'm currently making some new work for a solo show at Manchester's (UK) Paper Gallery.

I've been making work that explores women's wigs for some time now. My work broadly explores what it means to be female and what it means to 'be' a body. For me, wigs present themselves as fascinating objects through which to explore these questions. Not just because, historically, the wig's materiality (the way the hair of the wig came from different people, and animals) has often caused it to 'erode' our sense of the body's boundaries. Additionally, rather than simply mask or project a wearer's existing identity, the wig often leads the wearer into a fulfillment of new identities.

A woman's wig, can be perceived, much like hair, as a signifier of gender – or even a stand in for the female body. This is how I'm using the wig in my photography. I'm interested in opening up more fundamental properties of the wig to explore their own interior spaces.

I'm experimenting with bringing together the interior and exterior space by cutting through my photographs of wigs. Holes connect inside and outside. They can suggest incompleteness – to the form or the body, a way of suggesting multiple reconfigurations between wig, body and gender. For me it's a way of highlighting the fact that the feminine signifiers of the wig, or the feminine illusion presented by the wig, is fragile and unstable. By cutting into it I am hoping to reveal its instability. It's also how I explore the possibility of the body and the visualization of gender on the body as a constant state of change.

That said, **my work** is starting to become a kind of meditation on what might be inside the wig's interior. It's a space that doesn't really exist in a physical sense as it's designed as a surface that's molded to the wearer's head rather than an actual space. But to reveal it, even in a suggestive way, can open a wig up to other readings.



SARAH EYRE – CUT/COPY/PASTE

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Sarah Eyre Fluoro1 (c) the artists and Paper Gallery

Bad hair day? [Sarah Eyre's](#) first solo exhibition at artist-led Manchester Gallery, [PAPER](#), takes wigs as her focal point.

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[Eyre's](#) explores shifting boundaries between objects one wears and their relationship to the body. Using photography and collage techniques to introduce subtle interventions within her own photographic work as well as upon found images, she subverts conventional object/body relations.

[Eyre's](#) current work deals specifically with women's wigs and their relationship to gender and identity. She has manipulated and photographed women's wigs in order to draw attention to their strangeness, their surreal qualities when detached from the body. By cutting through layers of photographs, she is literally opening up the wig in order to create playful relationships between interior and exterior, and meditating on what might be inside the void created within the actual wig. This space does not exist in a physical sense. The wig is designed as a surface that is moulded to the wearer's head rather than to an actual space, but by revealing it, even in a suggestive way, can open a wig up to multiple readings.



Sarah Eyre Krissie Split (c) the artist and Paper Gallery

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Sarah Eyre is based in West Yorkshire, and has recently exhibited at Huddersfield Art Gallery, Dean Clough in Halifax, and QUAD Derby as part of Format: International Photography Festival. She has also been included in group exhibitions in France and China. Her work has been published in Source Magazine, Hunger.TV, and Of The Afternoon magazine.

Eyre was selected for PAPER's mentoring scheme, Tracing PAPER in 2016. She completed a BA (Hons) in Photography at Nottingham Trent University and an MA in Documentary Television and Film production at the University of Salford, and is currently undertaking a practice-based PhD at Manchester School of Art.

See the exhibition:

PAPER, Unit 12 Mirabel Studios, 14-20 Mirabel Street, Manchester, M3 1PJ

Exhibition dates: 7 October – 11 November 2017

Private View: Thursday 5 October 2017, 6-9pm

Sarah Eyre website: www.saraheyre.co.uk